

Unified Command News Release

Marina State Beach Tarball Incident

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Media Contacts: Dana Michaels, OSPR Public Affairs: 916-327-9948

For immediate release

Oil tarballs come ashore in Monterey Bay

The California Department of Fish and Game Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR), U. S. Coast Guard, and State Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) are responding to the appearance of numerous oil tarballs on State beaches in the Monterey Bay Area. The source of the oil is unknown at this time.

At the direction of the Monterey County Dept. of Environmental Health, DPR has closed approximately 15 miles of beaches, from Zmudowski State Beach south to Fort Ord, near Stilwell Hall, until further notice. The public is asked to avoid this area; parking lots and access points are closed.

DFG-OSPR and the Coast Guard have established a Unified Command post in Marina, to direct the response and clean-up, as mandated by State and Federal laws and the Area Contingency Plan. The Coast Guard has hired an oil spill response organization to conduct the clean-up, which is expected to continue through this weekend.

To date, only one dead, oiled bird — a Common murre — has been collected. Wildlife operations staff are searching on both water and shoreline for any additional oiled wildlife. The State's Oiled Wildlife Care Network is on stand-by.

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Samples of the oil product have been taken, and will be analyzed by OSPR's Petroleum Chemistry Laboratory in Rancho Cordova (near Sacramento), and the Coast Guard's Marine Safety Laboratory in Groton, Connecticut. The tarballs appear to be extremely weathered; some are almost the consistency of asphalt.

The closed beaches will be excluded from this Saturday's California Coastal Clean-up Day activities. Other beaches will be cleaned, as planned, unless additional oiling occurs.

Other government agencies involved in the spill response include the Monterey County Office of Emergency Services, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and Presidio of Monterey Police.